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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 001149

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/09/24

TAGS: [PINS](#) [DJ](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI : MINISTER OF DEFENSE ON SECURITY INCIDENT IN NORTH

REF: 09 DJIBOUTI 1109; 09 DJIBOUTI 649

CLASSIFIED BY: James Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1.(C) Summary: Minister of Defense Ahmed Kifleh Ougoureh provided further details of a late-August clash between Djiboutian Armed Forces (FAD) and an armed band in northern Djibouti's Mabla mountains, and reported continued infiltration of armed men from Eritrea, including some trained in mine-laying techniques. Ougoureh, who is an ethnic Afar and former rebel commander, closely tracks security developments in the north. End summary.

12. (C) On September 14, Minister of Defense Ahmed Kifleh Ougoureh provided Ambassador and DATT with additional details of a clash o/a August 29-30 between Djiboutian FAD and a group of approximately 20 armed men in the Mabla mountains that straddle northern Djibouti's Obock and Tadjourah regions (Ref A). The sub-company level FAD contingent (a "section," exact number not specified) was on patrol from the town of Galela (42'90"E; 12'00" N). As the FAD marched uphill in difficult terrain, a group of approximately 20 armed men began firing from positions above. Pinned down in a vulnerable position, the FAD called for helicopter support. One FAD helicopter responded and fired shots to disperse the attackers. Ougoureh had no information on casualties on either side. While mobilizing the helicopter proved effective, Ougoureh said, the GODJ had decided not to do so in the future as the deployment of air assets had produced negative publicity and a slew of rumors that exaggerated the extent of the clash (Ref A).

13. (C) Ougoureh said infiltration of armed youth opposed to the GODJ continued from Eritrea. He estimated the total number of armed youth now operating in northern Djibouti at 300. In addition to receiving arms and ammunition from Eritrea, some have also received specialized training in laying anti-vehicle mines and booby-trapping them to prevent dismantling. (Note: there have been at least three reported mine incidents on roads in northern Djibouti during 2009. End note.) The GODJ continues to gather information about these groups, Ougoureh said, recently exploiting two deserters from the ranks of infiltrators in the region of Musa Ali (near the triple border with Ethiopia and Eritrea). These deserters had identified five collaborators in the local community who were being questioned.

14. (C) Comment: Ougoureh, a former commander of the Afar rebel movement "Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy" (FRUD) which joined the government in 1994, is not/not an influential figure on defense matters in Djibouti. However, he does closely follow security developments in northern Djibouti. His description of the late August incident in the Mablal reinforces our view that - while exaggerated in some press and internet reports - the FAD

did indeed clash with an armed band in this area. His update on reported infiltrations from Eritrea contained little new but suggests this phenomenon continues (Ref B).

SWAN